



## **Report to the Legislature**

# **Work Support Benefits**

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 207(1)(b)

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Department of Social & Health Services  
Economic Services Administration  
Community Services Division  
PO Box 45440  
Olympia, WA 98504-5440

*The contact for this report is Mike Masten, Director of the Community Services Division,  
Economic Services Administration, (360) 413-3370, Fax (360) 413-3491*

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# WORK SUPPORT BENEFITS

## INFORMING TANF FAMILIES ON NON-CASH ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

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### STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

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Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 107(1)(b) requires the Department of Social and Health Services to prepare an annual report to the Legislature that addresses the following requirements:

*Develop informational materials that educate families about the difference between cash assistance and work support benefits. These materials must explain, among other facts, that the benefits are designed to support their employment, that there are no time limits on the receipts of work support benefits, and that immigration or residency status will not be affected by the receipt of benefits. These materials shall be posted in all community service offices and distributed to families. Materials must be available in multiple languages.*

*When a family leaves the temporary assistance for needy families program, receives cash diversion assistance, or withdraws a temporary assistance for needy families application, the department of social and health services shall educate them about the difference between cash assistance and work support benefits and offering them the opportunity to begin or to continue receiving work support benefits, so long as they are eligible. The department shall provide this information through in-person interviews, over the telephone, and/or through the mail. Work support benefits include food stamps, Medicaid for all family members, Medicaid or state children's health insurance program for children, and child care assistance.*

*The department shall report annually to the legislature the number of families who have had exit interviews, been reached successfully by phone, and sent mail. The report shall also include the percentage of families who elect to continue each of the benefits and the percentage found ineligible by each substantive reason code. A substantive reason code shall not be "other." The report shall identify barriers to informing families about work support benefits and describe existing and future actions to overcome such barriers.*

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### INFORMATIONAL MATERIAL

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Since the implementation of the state's WorkFirst program in 1997, the department has created various brochures and posters in multiple languages to inform clients of the availability and purpose of work support benefits, including food assistance, Medicaid for all family members, Medicaid or state children's health insurance program (CHIP) for children, child support collection services, and child care assistance. These written materials stress that these benefits are not time limited, have no lifetime limits, and do not affect immigration status. Work support benefits are marketed to clients at entry, during their stay on assistance, and at exit through a variety of media.

The department stresses the importance of providing written material, as well as the availability and nature of these benefits, in the online WorkFirst Handbook<sup>1</sup>: “Participants may be overwhelmed by financial or personal crisis when the orientation occurs. They may also be very unfamiliar with our system. Providing written material will give them a way to review the material presented at their leisure when their situation is more settled.”

Because of this dynamic, posters are displayed in Community Services Offices (CSO) and staff distribute written information about work support benefits to clients throughout their stay on assistance (e.g., at application, orientation, job search, eligibility reviews, and when they find a job). Each month, the department mails the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Exit brochure to persons who exit TANF, persons whose TANF application is denied or withdrawn, and upon approval of Diversion Cash Assistance.

The table below shows the range of materials currently available that describe the availability of work support benefits.

***Current Educational Material***

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	AVAILABILITY
WorkFirst Brochures (DSHS 22-398 & 399)	ESD brochures titled “Your First Step Towards Independence” and “When You Start Working” used by ESD and DSHS staff to describe childcare, medical, and other available benefits (like Earned Income Tax Credit).	Since January 2000
Call Center Brochure (EMS #10329, Commodity Code 7540-032-846)	Describes ongoing childcare and medical coverage for employed clients and provides a toll-free number for the Employment Security Department (ESD) Call Center .	Currently available
Food Assistance Brochures & Posters	Describes food assistance eligibility as part of the DSHS food assistance outreach campaign.	Currently available
Help for Working Families Brochure(DSHS22-995)	Provides all required work support benefit information and a toll-free number for the Help for Working Families campaign launched in August 2000 (described in more detail later)..	Since January 2001
Orientation Video & Brochure	Targeted work support benefit information for newly approved TANF clients distributed at WorkFirst Orientation.	Since February 2001
Exit Brochure & Poster (DSHS 22-476)	Targeted work support benefit information mailed to TANF denials, withdrawals, TANF exits, and Diversion Cash Assistance approvals. Also available to Food Assistance/Medicaid outreach contractors.	Brochure has been available since August 2001 Poster January 2002

<sup>1</sup> Section 1.4 – WorkFirst Orientation

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	AVAILABILITY
TANF Termination/Denial Notices	Computer-generated termination and denial letters with specific language to educate clients about availability of work support benefits.	Since November 2001
Informed Client Insert DSHS 22-534	Included in Informed Client Brochure for applicants, includes support services.	Since August 2001
Informed Client Brochure DSHS 22-501	Complete program descriptions and CSO specific information. Also includes a customer service survey.	Since August 2001

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## TRANSITIONING FAMILIES TO WORK SUPPORT BENEFITS

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The department describes the importance of educating families about work support benefits to staff in its online [WorkFirst Handbook](#)<sup>2</sup>: “It is very important that we explain to participants that the supports listed below<sup>3</sup> do not carry a 60-month time limit and do not affect the family’s TANF time limit. We also want to make sure people understand what supports are available, so they can start planning for their future independence.”

The handbook goes on to describe the critical stages people go through as they move from welfare to self-sufficiency and the requirement to review the types of supports needed as they make this transition. Specifically, staff are instructed to review employer-provided medical coverage when a client becomes employed and to continue food assistance, medical coverage,<sup>4</sup> and child care when a family exits TANF.

Last, the handbook requires staff to “Remind participants on a regular basis what supports are available and what supports they can receive after they leave TANF without affecting their 60-month limit for TANF benefit receipt.”

### WRITTEN NOTICES

The previous section on Informational Material describes the types of written work support benefit information the department provides to clients. All clients receive written work support information in the office or through the mail within 60 days of leaving TANF, receiving cash diversion assistance, being denied TANF, or withdrawing a TANF application. Further, to re-enforce the message and for greater impact, clients receive this written information at various times while they are participating in the WorkFirst program.

The department has added additional language to automated notices to ensure that every client receives written information through the mail at the appropriate times and in the appropriate language.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 2.1 – Supports Overview

<sup>3</sup> The list includes medical, food, and child care assistance.

<sup>4</sup> Medicaid, Children’s Medical and Basic Health Plan coverage.

## VERBAL INFORMATION

The department provides work support benefit information to all clients through in-person interviews at least once. Our experience has taught us that it may be very difficult (or sometimes impossible) to contact clients after they leave the program.<sup>5</sup> Further, we cannot afford to wait until a client leaves assistance to have this very important conversation. The department's strategy is to personally discuss work support benefits in the beginning at the time of the face-to-face eligibility interview to ensure this information is discussed with each client.

WorkFirst case managers also have other in-person conversations with TANF clients at Orientation and eligibility reviews. To the extent staff are able to contact a client in-person or by phone after she or he withdraws an application or exits TANF, staff will verbally review this critical information once again.

The department continues to work with the Governor's Office and WorkFirst partner agencies to further promote post-TANF contacts and encourage one-on-one discussions with clients. The Help for Working Families Campaign and the WorkFirst Call Center (WPLEX) created by the Employment Security Department continue to be available to serve TANF exiters. In addition, the department developed and implemented in 2001 the Informed Client Initiative that uses multiple forms of media, including printed information (A Guide to Accessing Services Brochure), use of telephony (The Answer Phone and customer service centers), and the Internet (The Online CSO). Washington has received national recognition for the Online CSO and its electronic application for benefits.

### ***Informed Client Initiative***

*The Informed Client Initiative, launched in August 2001, makes major improvements to the way the department informs citizens about the availability of services and how to access these services. The initiative uses multiple forms of media including printed material, telephony, and the Internet.*

*Printed materials include Your Community Services Office, A Guide to Accessing Services brochure. This brochure provides comprehensive information about all the programs available at the local CSO, how to apply for services, frequently asked questions, other resources, comment and feedback form, as well as other CSO site and program specific inserts. This guide represents a giant leap forward in providing clients with information on multiple ways to access services and what those services include.*

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<sup>5</sup> Difficulties commonly arise when a former client has no phone, is working during office hours, does not want further contact with the department, or has moved. Due to these factors, mailed notices are the most reliable method to consistently provide work support benefits information to post-TANF clients.

*In addition to providing improved written materials at local Community Services Offices, the department has made the Guide to Accessing Services information available on the DSHS Internet at [www.wa.gov/dshs](http://www.wa.gov/dshs) or [www.onlinecso.dshs.wa.gov](http://www.onlinecso.dshs.wa.gov). Not only can individuals gather information about services but they can also apply for services via the Internet. Other features of this website include eligibility information, review forms for recipients, local office locator, frequently asked questions, other CSO forms, resources, news, and links to other DSHS sites. Persons throughout the state applying for services can effectively use this website. Washington is the first state in the union to make the application on-line via the Internet.*

*The final component of the Informed Client Initiative is using telephone technology to provide useful information to clients at all hours of the day and night. Clients can use The Answer Phone to obtain case status, payment and medical information, obtain a caseworker's phone number, or check for case specific information left by a case manager.*

The Informed Client Initiative grew out of a need to provide more comprehensive information to our customers. The Guide to Accessing Services and the Online CSO web site includes a survey form that people can use to rate customer satisfaction. Survey results are reviewed to determine the need for changes and enhancements.

### ***TANF Exiter Brochure***

*In addition to the initial package of information clients receive when entering the CSO and throughout their stay on TANF, the department also provides written materials after exit. This brochure provides targeted information regarding the availability of food and medical assistance, Working Connections Child Care, and child support services.*

*Duplicated throughout the brochure is the message that these work support benefits do not have time limits or lifetime limits, can be received separately and apart from TANF, and do not affect immigration or residency status with INS.*

*There is program contact information in the brochure, which includes the Help for Working Families Call Center, Child Care Information and Referral, Domestic Violence Hotline, Medical Assistance Customer Service Center, and WorkFirst Post Employment Service (WPLEX).*

*In 2002, the Economic Services Administration (ESA) mailed out approximately 35,000 of these brochures to TANF exiters, persons denied TANF or cash diversion assistance, and cash diversion assistance recipients — reminding them of the availability of other services and supports that can help them.*

*This brochure is available to food assistance outreach contractors and Medicaid outreach contractors.*

*The toll-free number for information is 1-877-980-9131.*

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### CONTINUED BENEFIT RECEIPT

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The budget proviso requires the inclusion of the following information in the annual report to the Legislature:

- Total number of families who have had exit interviews, been successfully reached by telephone, and sent mail. ESA staff have operationalized the process of informing clients about work support benefits. Every household leaving TANF assistance has had this conversation at least once and received information by mail.
- The report shall also include the percentage of families who elect to receive each benefit and the percent found ineligible by substantive reason code. Below are several tables showing the trend of more clients who receive support benefits apart from TANF.

#### Food Assistance Authorized by Case Type

	Public Assistance and Food Assistance	Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Food Assistance	Non-Public Assistance Food Stamps (NAFS)
June 99	55,018	29,358	55,443
June 00	51,344	29,847	58,211
June 01	53,664	31,007	65,947

*Source: ESA Briefing Book, 1999, 2000, and 2001*

**Number of Individuals Receiving Family-based Medicaid in  
Washington State under either Section 1931 or Transitional Medical Assistance  
(Change from July 1997 to March 2001)**

	<b>Family Medical and TANF</b>	<b>Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) (no TANF)</b>	<b>Family Medical but not TANF</b>	<b>Total Receiving TMA or Family Medical but not TANF</b>
<b>July 1997</b>	236,219	22,475	19,393	41,868
<b>March 2001</b>	123,379	57,387	70,700	128,087
<b>Sept 2002</b>	111,393	62,264	75,435	137,699
<b>Change from 7/97 to 9/02</b>	(124,826)	39,789	56,042	95,831

*Source: DSHS Medical Assistance Administration*

**Children Served by Working Connections Child Care**

<b>SFY 98</b>	<b>TANF</b> 24,223	<b>Non-TANF</b> 25,401	<b>SFY Total</b> 49,624	<b>Percent change</b>
<b>SFY 99</b>	<b>TANF</b> 22,349	<b>Non-TANF</b> 34,653	<b>SFY Total</b> 57,002	13%
<b>SFY 00</b>	<b>TANF</b> 18,187	<b>Non-TANF</b> 46,734	<b>SFY Total</b> 64,921	12.2%
<b>SFY 01</b>	<b>TANF</b> 17,205	<b>Non-TANF</b> 56,839	<b>SFY Total</b> 74,044	12.4%

*Source: ESA Briefing Book, 2000 and 2001*

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**BARRIERS & SOLUTIONS TO INFORMING FAMILIES**

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The department faces a variety of challenges in educating families about work support benefits. We use a holistic approach to help families make informed decisions about the benefits that are available. As demonstrated with the Informed Client Initiative, the use of multimedia helps us effectively communicate this message. The table below describes the department's major challenges and solutions:



### Barriers and Solutions to Educating Families

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
Contacting clients post-TANF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary method is automated mailings</li> <li>• Provide information upfront during face-to-face eligibility review and throughout stay on assistance</li> <li>• Toll-free numbers during expanded hours and use of the Internet (i.e., Help for Working Families Call Center, WorkFirst Call Center [WPLEX], and Online CSO)</li> <li>• Food Assistance Outreach campaign in local communities</li> <li>• Medical Assistance Outreach campaign in local communities</li> </ul>
Sending complicated message to families in crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide written and verbal explanations in various formats (e.g., videos, brochures, and posters)</li> <li>• Present information at various times for maximum impact</li> </ul>
Clients who are limited-English proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide translated material</li> <li>• Use interpreters for in-office or telephone interviews</li> <li>• Request contractors reinforce the work support benefits message by reviewing it with clients in a culturally sensitive, language-appropriate setting</li> </ul>
Unfounded fears of negative impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple contacts from staff and community partners to provide written and verbal reassurance</li> </ul>
Human error	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional language in automated client notices can reduce the potential for human error</li> </ul>

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## SUMMARY

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The department provides written information, available in multiple languages, to all families who leave TANF, receive Diversion Cash Assistance (DCA), withdraw applications, or are denied cash aid, and provides additional automated support to ensure families get the correct information in the appropriate language at the appropriate times.

The department also ensures that each of these families engages in at least one face-to-face discussion of the availability of work support benefits that do not affect TANF time limits or immigration/residency status. Further direct client contacts occur to the extent possible. Furthermore, three different outreach campaigns provide additional opportunities for clients to discuss these benefits through community contacts, toll-free numbers, and expanded office hours.

The department uses a variety of techniques to overcome barriers to getting this important information to clients. Major barriers include clients who may be hard to contact, have trouble understanding the rules, have unfounded fears of negative impacts, or have trouble speaking or understanding English.

Our solutions range from expanding our automation capabilities to using toll-free numbers and expanded office hours and asking trusted emissaries from the local community to help us get the information disseminated.

The department will continue to collaborate with community partners to remove any remaining barriers to effective communication with clients. The department is committed to sending out clear, consistent, and easy to understand information about non-time-limited benefits designed to support employment without adversely affecting immigration or residency status. Being able to access and receive these services may make all the difference in a family becoming and remaining independent of TANF.